ENVIRONMENTAL
Fact Sheet

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Services

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New Portable Fuel Containers Help Improve Air and Water Quality

Did you know that portable gasoline containers contribute to air and water pollution in several ways, and may even be affecting your family's health? Most households contain at least one gasoline container, usually stored in the garage or basement, for refueling yard and garden equipment or recreational vehicles. People usually do not give much thought to the type or proper use of these fuel containers and their environmental impacts.

The Problem with Gas Cans

In the past, gasoline containers made of plastic or metal were designed to accommodate quick and easy refueling and storage of gasoline. Unfortunately, gasoline fumes contain smog-forming "volatile organic compounds" (or VOCs) that escape from these cans into the air when fuel is being dispensed. Vapors also escape through secondary vent holes in the cans or inadequately capped spouts and can even permeate through the plastic walls of the container. Sometimes gasoline is spilled onto equipment or on the ground during refueling. When this occurs, chemicals contained in the gasoline, such as benzene, toluene, or MtBE, can contaminate drinking water wells or public water supplies.

While pollution from a single gas can seems small, the total number of containers is such that they contribute significantly to smog-forming emissions and water contamination. Air and water pollution from gasoline storage and use has been directly linked to human illnesses and damage to plants and animals.

New Gas Cans Now Available that Reduce Air and Water Pollution

New portable fuel containers or gas cans that have been redesigned to eliminate the release of air pollutants and potential for spillage during use and storage are now available for sale in New Hampshire. These containers have been designed with special features to meet air quality standards adopted by many Mid-Atlantic and Northeast states, including New Hampshire. Use of these new containers will help New Hampshire meet federally-mandated requirements to reduce harmful air emissions by eliminating more than one ton of VOC emissions per day in the state.

By March 1, 2007, retailers will be required by state regulations to only sell those containers that comply with the new environmentally-safe standards.

Consumers Can Help

Consumers can take a positive step toward helping the environment by replacing their older, non-compliant cans with the new and improved fuel containers. As a conscientious consumer, when you shop for a new portable gas container, read the label carefully and look for those that are spill-proof and meet the new standards for VOC emissions. The new cans may be identified by the phrase "Spill-Proof System" or "Spill-Proof Spout" on the label. They are made to meet, but not exceed, specific fuel flow rates and fill level limits. Special features include:

Automatic shut-off devices that stop the flow of fuel before the tank can overflow and that close and seal when removed from the fuel tank.

Single openings for both filling and pouring, eliminating secondary vent holes.

Less permeable materials that limit the amount of vapors that can escape.

Other Tips for Keeping New Hampshire's Air and Water Clean

In addition to using the new improved gas cans, consumers can protect air and water quality from harmful gasoline contaminants in the following ways:

- Avoid spilling gasoline on the ground. Don't top off your fuel tank when filling your lawn mower, snow blower, or other yard or recreational equipment.
- Refuel or repair engines away from water supplies or wells, or if possible, over a concrete floor, and immediately clean up any gas or oil spills.
- Dispose of waste gasoline and clean up materials safely and properly. Never drain gasoline or oil onto the ground or pour down drains.
- Never use gasoline to start fires.
- Use caution when refueling boats to avoid spilling gasoline into waterbodies.
- Store gasoline properly by keeping the containers tightly closed and placing them in dry, well-ventilated locations.

For More Information

For more information on gasoline containers and air quality, contact the DES Air Resources Division at (603) 271-1370.